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ABSTRACT

The author reviews the development of broadcast education and its current status, and then discusses some of the dissatisfactions that educators, broadcasters, and students have with the present broadcast curricula. He feels that communications departments should offer programs that serve all college students, not merely those who are interested in broadcasting as a career. The goals he sets forth are: (1) an initial course in integrated media for every student; (2) a course, also for every student, in communications history and theory; (3) courses to provide comparative understanding, for the broadcasting major, of the mass communications media and the societies they serve; (4) professional study in oral and written aspects of broadcast communication; and (5) advanced courses for specialization in writing, programming, management, or production. He emphasizes the importance of internship programs in providing experience beyond the classroom or laboratory. He concludes with a statement of the characteristics and attitudes that a graduate of a future broadcast education program should possess.
(Author/RN)

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A NEW LOOK AT THE BROADCAST CURRICULA

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(Presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, December, 1972)

In thinking about the topic for discussion today my first inclination was to review the course titles and descriptions which appear in our university bulletins. This would be the way to get an up-to-date picture of the broadcast curricula.

However, on second thought, to place very much dependence upon college bulletins required more faith in their accuracy than I possessed. The course descriptions are often written by persons other than the current instructors--and even with the same instructor changes occur which are not revealed in the bulletins. Further, how can you accurately describe a course in 22 words or less, even omitting the pompous objectives.

One might also think that canvassing former students who are now in the industry as to what changes should take place in the curricula would give us some helpful guidelines. We have done this informally on occasion, with mixed results. The lad who ended up in sales is very certain everyone should have courses in marketing and sales research. The girl who works as a production assistant feels more time should be given to studio activity. The boy who works in the radio-tv department of an advertising agency is just as certain he should have been hard at work learning more "principles of advertising".

On occasion, when we have consulted with station managers about training requirements, they tend to tell us we should stress whatever the personnel need is at their station at that particular time.

The point is that no one is completely satisfied with the broadcast curricula today. It is time to take a look at our old recipes. Personally, I feel this unrest, this probing, is exactly as it should be. Smugness is never a virtue, and smugness in mass communications instruction would be catastrophic.

May we begin our case with two assumptions: Number one: Each of us is concerned with and is working toward curricular improvement. Number two: There are no experts who can give us precise answers. Whether we have been teaching for four years or forty years, the absolutes evade us--and probably always will. A large part of our destiny is involved in both search and struggle.

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Many years ago Chancellor Hutchins at the University of Chicago told his deans that every five years each department ought to cancel all of its courses and start from the beginning with new ones. Only this way, he said, could the deadwood be eliminated.

The Chancellor's statement is, of course, based upon the assumption that the institution has an energetic and dedicated faculty. There is little point in changing course numbers and catalog descriptions if the same old things are going to be taught in the same old ways. The crux of the situation, then, lies in keeping faculties as aware, as alert, and as eager to learn in their mature years as they were in their graduate ones.

Given this kind of faculty, some courses will give way; new areas of study will open within established courses.

One is hopeful past changes have occurred throughout the broadcast curricula in a manner not unlike Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest, and that the instructor himself has "evolved" in both knowledge and experience. If he hasn't, as we've said, writing course descriptions is a futile effort anyway.

The last figures I saw indicated there are now 180 colleges offering bachelor degrees with a major in radio and television. We also have 87 schools offering a master's degree in the area, and 27 institutions offering the doctorate. Almost 1400 instructors, either full or parttime, are engaged in teaching broadcast subjects at degree institutions.

We don't want to play the numbers game too long, but it should be mentioned the newest development is the inclusion of broadcasting courses in the curricula of junior and community colleges. Over eighty of these have now joined our ranks. Nor is the end in sight.

A new community college submitted a broadcasting curricula proposal to me for reaction recently. Would you believe a course in radio control room techniques and one in television control room techniques? Plus, of course, the staple battery of TV directing I and II and TV production I and II.

We will not concern ourselves with the graduate picture, but one would hope all of the courses at all of these institutions are not the result of some rabbit-like multiplication. We desperately hope the numerical growth is being anchored in an

underlying philosophical girding which can both explain and justify its existence. If this isn't true, the future of American broadcasting is indeed jaundiced.

Strengthening the broadcast curricula, in our humble mind, does not mean the mere proliferation of courses or instruction. In some cases, it may entail the actual subtraction of courses, no matter how the empire builders feel. We submit the time is upon us to reexamine in what direction we are headed and what our objectives should be. Are we responsible solely for supplying good employees for the broadcast industry? What is our responsibility in furthering the education of the non-broadcasting employees? Can we combine the two? We assuredly hope so.

May we ask your indulgence for a few moments to set up what we feel to be appropriate instructional goals for departments such as ours.

In the first place, we believe every college student these days should have an initial course in integrated media. The understanding of audiovisual communication should be viewed and taught as a synthesis of the elements common to television, film, still photography, audio control, and sound utilization. Emphasis should be placed on the art and science of visualization and auralization as opposed to the separate production processes of mass media.

The rationale for such a course is based upon the new interest expressed by students and faculty throughout the academic community for an understanding of non-print communication. It is no longer the exceptional student who wants to make a videotape as his term paper for a course in communication strategy, or a film on Indian dances for a final project in anthropology, or an audiotape on ghetto attitudes for his study of urban problems. Efforts such as these merely serve to reinforce the fact that people from virtually all disciplines are seeing an increasing need for non-print media in their own scholarly communications. A course emphasizing the integrated media will serve to analyze and explain our various art and communications forms. It should be jointly taught, we feel, by specialists from the areas of radio, television, film, and photography, and should include instruction in small workshop groups.

In the second place, all college students we feel should be well grounded in communication history and theory. This is the broad base upon which to build. It is difficult to see how anyone can understand the world today without some background in mass communications history. Our illustrious colleagues in liberal arts are fully

aware of the industrial revolution and its impact on the world. Many of them, however, seem to have no awareness of the revolution in communications which followed close upon its heels. Newsprint, cinema, photography, radio, television are just peripheral, dilettantish events which merit no scholarly attention. To our mind, nothing could be further from the truth. Let one of our goals be that the educated man of the future will be as aware of communications history and theory and their impact upon the world as he is today of the history of, say, American literature.

Thirdly, and at this stage we assume our student wishes to become a professional, a major in our department, if you will, he must have a clear, a very clear, understanding of the contemporary mass communications media, how they work, and their economic problems. He must know how they relate to various aspects of contemporary living, to society as a whole, to government and to education. In other words, there should be a comparative knowledge of the attitudes and policies of broadcasting as they are shaped in the social context. This involves, among other things, the contributions which Radio and Television can make in helping to solve those distressing problems which divide us as a people.

Fourthly, for professional student, he must move into areas of study which will give him competency in both oral and written aspects of broadcast communication. This is the goal of such classes in announcing, writing, and production, but not theirs exclusively so. Many courses in speech and liberal arts have a related goal and their content should be an important part of the student's education. There are rich areas to be tapped in allied disciplines. It is here, of course, where we assuredly part company with the vocational or trade schools.

Fifthly, for our professional student must begin an area of some specialization in broadcast education. This calls for advanced work in writing, programming, management or production. And certainly there should be included a study of contemporary critical methods as they apply to the mass communication media. Since film is an integral part of television (if not the art form of the twentieth century as its adherents proclaim), strong support can be garnered for the inclusion of such courses as modes of film communication and documentary film.

Many of us are helped budgetwise and instructionwise in this final area of specialization by the inclusion of internship programs with nearby broadcasting

operations. These internships enable the student to journey off the campus and engage in the day by day activities of professionals. He finds himself involved with a whole new set of problems, a major one being that time is now equated with money, and his learning has a new dimension. Unfortunately, we don't have as many internships as we would like, but wherever they exist they should be nurtured and expanded.

This proposed framework is offered as an alternative to the current and almost inverse pyramiding of broadcasting curricula. We suggest that a broadcast curriculum which is based upon these major areas--involvement in an integrated media, the history and theory of mass communications, their current operations and social responsibilities, basic communication skills, and, finally, a degree of professional specialization--provides a direction and framework upon which to build, a framework sometimes lacking among today's expansive curricula builders.

If you have occasion to review graduate applications, I suspect you have been appalled as I at the number of courses in broadcasting some institutions permit for undergraduate credit. One seriously questions whether more than one-quarter of a student's undergraduate work should be devoted to work in mass communication and broadcasting. Courses in speech, fine art, science, social science, literature, music, history, philosophy should occupy a substantial 75% of the undergraduate time. We submit we are robbing him of his birthright of a true education if we do otherwise. As an obvious corollary, we have the responsibility of wringing from each course we teach its fullest educational potential.

May we turn for a moment to another possible way of changing our broadcast curricula. This is the matter of improving our raw materials--the students themselves.

We in broadcast education have the problem of attracting the most able, intelligent students possible. Some kind of recruitment of the better students on the one hand and some kind of discouragement of those who are merely passing time on the other is long since overdue. Providing the best curricula for the average or below average student is neither going to improve our departments nor strengthen mass communications in this country in the long haul.

One would hope, for instance, that sometime the individual giants of the broadcast industry would recognize their responsibilities in this area, just as the newspaper industry has done so well in times past. With such funds we can attract

the caliber of students needed for a lifetime dedication to the ever increasingly important communications media.

Given such a training program as we have described, and given the highest caliber of student, we might well ask ourselves what "breed of cat" we are developing. I would hope the student of the coming decade would be able to perform more ably than his predecessor in any broadcasting environment or allied field. His characteristics assuredly should include:

1. A clear knowledge of the creative processes involved in the uses of integrated media;
2. A thorough understanding of the history and theory of mass communications and the way they relate to contemporary living;
3. A knowledge of the fundamental skills of broadcasting with a proficiency in at least one;
4. An awareness of the social responsibility of broadcasting and a dedication to the realization of its fullest potential; and a concern for his less fortunate countrymen; he must be, if you will, the servant of a tender conscience.
5. A knowledge of the fine arts (broadcasting leans too heavily on speech, music, and drama to ignore this);
6. Finally, we believe there should be an inclination for the creative, which manifests itself in so many different ways in the broadcasting environment.

Given the above characteristics, plus certain basic personal ones, we need never worry either about our graduate's future or, more importantly, the role of the mass media when he inherits the position of decision maker.

Ambitious as all of this sounds, you and I both know we cannot expect to turn out graduates who have reached their full potential as broadcasters. We cannot bestow maturity at commencement, whether at the end of four or three years. At his best, however, our graduate will be ready to forge the anchors of the intellect and conscience. Was it Bacon who said the right question revealed half of knowledge? At his worst our graduate will meet this minimum requirement.

It is to be hoped that our students, exposed to such a program as we have described, will be better trained, better able to adjust to a changing world than most of us who have had a share in their training.